

Sponsored Supplement to *SSIR*
**Philanthropy Can Catalyze an Open Government
Movement**
By Martin Tisné

Stanford Social Innovation Review
Spring 2013

Copyright © 2013 by Leland Stanford Jr. University
All Rights Reserved

Philanthropy Can Catalyze an Open Government Movement

BY MARTIN TISNÉ

The initial phase of Open Government Partnership (OGP) illustrates how philanthropic funding can catalyze and help build sectors. In September 2010, a small group of private organizations—under the aegis of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, a donor collaborative including funders such as Omidyar Network, Open Society Foundations, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and Hivos (as well as two leading international NGOs, International Budget Partnership and Revenue Watch Institute)—recognized the opportunity OGP presented. They backed the government and civil society reformers with funding, connections, and intellectual support.

This funder engagement was vital in giving OGP instigators the external validation

not all—of these communities of practice have developed their own, somewhat siloed, international standard-setting initiatives. The net result is a veritable alphabet soup of international initiatives: EITI, IATI, GIFT, META, COST, ODC. All are dedicated to increasing transparency, participation, and accountability in their specific sub-sectors (oil, gas, mining, budgets, medicine, construction, open data).

OGP itself is not a standard-setting body. It provides a forum for the standard-setters to use as a policy hook for their work. It has provided—in the words of John Wonderlich, policy director of the Sunlight Foundation—a “softball” to the civil society community, to develop new open government norms and standards and energize existing ones. Civil society groups that seek to build, or are on the verge of developing, in-

MARTIN TISNÉ is director, policy at Omidyar Network. Previously, he was founding director of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, where he helped found the Open Government Partnership.



open government discussion, leading to the creation and development of new norms and standards. The Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT), which aims to develop standards related to budget transparency and participation of citizens in the budget process, was directly inspired by OGP and includes two prominent OGP government members (Brazil and the Philippines) in its founding stewards group. The Open Data Charter (ODC) aims to provide a tool for civil society to benchmark the many open data commitments coming out of OGP as well as for government reformers developing—at a frenetic pace—new open data initiatives.

Third, OGP is beginning to influence large-scale standard-setting bodies and groups. The High Level Panel on the post-2015 development agenda (the rethink of the Millennium Development Goals) is co-chaired by three prominent OGP governments: Indonesia, the United Kingdom, and Liberia. Civil society and governments have spoken of an Open Development Goals approach to “open up” the UN-led process. Within the G8, G20, and OECD, OGP governments are caucusing and engaging with civil society in new ways to push forward “the power of open.”

Last and fascinatingly, standards are being developed by OGP from the bottom up in ways that we cannot yet imagine. As 58 governments make hundreds of commitments, norms will bubble up to the surface. If 25 governments start instituting citizen budgets, as the government of the Philippines recently did, a new way for governments to engage with citizens will emerge.

We are witnessing an incredibly exciting array of international initiatives, and OGP is energizing them and putting them into practice. At its heart, OGP holds the promise of bringing together these myriad communities and building a truly global open government movement. The philanthropic community's challenge now is to catalyze this innovation while building a joined-up sector, and resist the temptation to fund in silos. ●

OGP is energizing the global open government discussion, while developing new norms and standards—something donors should support.

and confidence they needed to take the idea full steam ahead. OGP was initiated by the United States, Brazil, and six other international governments, and early and flexible philanthropic support helped ensure the full participation of civil society—at a global level—and its eventual representation in OGP's governance structure.

The myriad constellations and communities of practice that make up the global open government sector are fascinating and the object of very little study. There are well over a dozen distinct open-government related communities of practice: freedom-of-information activists, open-data geeks, fiscal-transparency zealots, service-delivery monitors, financial-sector reform advocates, and many more. (A good overview is available on the Transparency and Accountability Initiative website.) Many—though

international norms can do so and then work with governments to include these norms in their open government partnership action plans. As of late 2012, OGP is contributing to international standard setting on open government in four ways.

First, governments are using OGP to adhere to existing standards. For example, the United States, Ukraine, and Colombia became signatories to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) as part of their OGP action plans. The United States also became a signatory to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) as part of its action plan. In fact, EITI has received significant interest from OGP countries, whose governments are signing up as well as pledging progress on EITI implementation as part of their country action plans.

Second, OGP is energizing the global